

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-02 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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R 251200Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1452
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 0177

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR BC UR
SUBJ: SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN BOTSWANA: ARRIVAL OF RESIDENT
AMBASSADOR

1. INCREASING SOVIET INTEREST AND ACTIVITIES IN BOTSWANA
HAVE BEEN RECENTLY DEMONSTRATED BY ARRIVAL IN GAOBORONE OF
FIRST RESIDENT SOVIET AMBASSADOR SINCE USSR/BOTSWANA RESI-
DENT RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED IN SEPTEMBER 1976. AMBAS-
SADOR-DESIGNATE MIKHAIL PETROV, 53, ARRIVED IN GABORONE
JANUARY 19 AND IMMEDIATELY RELEASED STATEMENT TO BOTSWANA
PRESS PLEDGING TO WORK FOR GOOD USSR/BOTSWANA RELATIONS
"FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLES OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES, IN
THE INTERESTS OF ANTI-IMPERIALIST AND ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE,
AND FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE AND PROGRESS IN THE WHOLE WORLD."

2. ACCORDING TO SKETCHY BIOGRAPHIC DATA PROVIDED BY DAILY
NEWS ARTICLE, PETROV PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS COUNSELOR OF
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SOVIET EMBASSIES IN LAGOS AND MOGADISCIO AND IN MFA
IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO HIS ASSIGNMENT TO BOTSWANA. PETROV
WAS ACCOMPANIED TO BOTSWANA BY HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER.

3. PETROV'S ARRIVAL COINCIDED WITH VISIT TO BOTSWANA
BY THREE-MAN DELEGATION FROM SOVIET AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY
COMMITTEE HEADED BY NEW TIMES EDITOR-IN-CHIEF MIKHAIL

FEDOROV. ACCORDING TO DAILY NEWS REPORT, DELEGATION VISITED BOTSWANA AT INVITATION OF RULING BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY (BDP) AND MET WITH VICE PRESIDENT MASIRE, EXTAFFMIN MOGWE AND EDUCATION MIN MORAKE. DURING COURSE OF VISIT, WHICH INCLUDED STOPS AT SEVERALEducational AND CRAFTS MANUFACTURING ESTABLISHMENTS, FEDOROV PRE-DICTABLY ASSOCIATED USSR WITH AFRICAN STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID AND "IMPERIALISM". AT JANUARY 23 PRESS CONFERENCE, FEDOROV STATED THAT HIS COMMITTEE "SUPPORTS BOTSWANA'S STAND AND APPRECIATES THE PROBLEMS FACING THIS COUNTRY". FEDOROV ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE WOULD MAKE AVAILABLE FIVE NEW SCHOLARSHIPS FOR BOTSWANA STUDENTS TO STUDY IN USSR. IN REPLY, MIN EXTAFF MOGWE STATED THAT GOB WILL "CONSIDER" OFFER OF THE FIVE NEW SCHOLARSHIPS.

4. COMMENT: IT HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN THAT SOVIET REPRESENTATION IN GABORONE WOULD BE RAISED TO AMBASSADORIAL LEVEL. NEVERTHELESS, PETROV'S ARRIVAL AND VISIT OF AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE DELEGATION UNDERLINE SOVIET DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH GOB AND RULING BDP. THESE TIES HAVE BEEN LACKLUSTER AND AT TIMES STRAINED BECAUSE OF SOVIET RECORD OF SUPPORT FOR MARXIST-ORIENTED OPPOSITION BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT (BNF) WHICH HAS THREATENED TO SEEK POWER BY "REVOLUTIONARY MEANS". ARRIVAL OF AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE PETROV AND OFFER OF NEW SCHOLAR-CONFIDENTIAL

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SHIPS MAY SIGNAL A SHIFT IN SOVIET POLICY IN FAVOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE BDP, POSSIBLY MOTIVATED BY DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE RECENT POOR POLITICAL PERFORMANCE OF THE MARXIST BNF.

5. HOWEVER, THE RENEWED SOVIET INTEREST IN OFFICIAL TIES WITH GOB AND ITS RULING PARTY MAY SIMPLY BE AN EFFORT TO KEEP ALL OPTIONS OPEN IN A COUNTRY WHICH WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY INCREASE IN IMPORTANCE AS AFRICAN "LIBERATION" MOVEMENTS INCREASINGLY FOCUS ON SOUTH AFRICA. MOGWE'S LUKEWARM AND CAUTIOUS RESPONSE TO OFFER OF NEW SCHOLARSHIPS INDICATES THAT GOB INTENDS TO MONITOR SOVIET ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING RELATIONS WITH THE MARXIST BNF.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING ANY BIOGRAPHIC DATA WHICH DEPARTMENT AND ADDRESSEE POSTS MIGHT HAVE ON AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE PETROV.
ALBERTI

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Message Attributes

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